

*Apr. 12 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001*

in others. I know we can have quality education for every child. And when we do, this great land of ours—by the way, the greatest Nation on the face of the Earth—will be even greater. We'll be even greater.

Thank you for coming, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. in Presidential Hall at the Dwight D. Eisen-

hower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Representative Rev. Floyd H. Flake, senior pastor, Cathedral of the Allen A.M.E. Church in Jamaica, New York. The President also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10).

## Remarks on Signing a Proclamation Commemorating the Birth of Thomas Jefferson

*April 12, 2001*

Good afternoon. Welcome. Welcome back, Thomas. [*Laughter*] Senator Warner and Senator Allen, it's good to see both. Congressman Goode, welcome. The first lady of the Commonwealth of Virginia, it's good to see you again. And I want to thank all the descendants of Thomas Jefferson who are here. I want to thank the Jefferson scholars who are here. I want to thank my fellow Americans who are here. Welcome to the White House.

As the White House's latest tenant, it is my pleasure to say, welcome back, Thomas Jefferson. Most people don't realize this, but Thomas Jefferson and I share a hobby: we both like to make up words. [*Laughter*] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Mr. Jefferson contributed more new words to the language than any other U.S. President. I especially like his term for barbaric pirates, "barbaresques." [*Laughter*] I'm also impressed by his words "debarrass" and "graffage."

The other day I tried a new word for our press corps, "misunderestimate." [*Laughter*] It's not quite in Jefferson's league, but I am giving it my best shot. [*Laughter*]

As you know, I've been trying to reduce taxes. Thomas Jefferson and I agree here, as well. He warned that government must expend the public money with the same care and economy we would practice with our own and impose on our own citizens no unnecessary burdens. That's something for all of us to think about, especially Members of the House and the Senate. [*Laughter*]

Jefferson can be quoted by the hour. He lived a long time ago, yet he still speaks directly to the present. Few former Presidents survive more vividly in our memories. And we feel his presence especially strongly in this place.

This is the room where Jefferson's Secretary, as Mr. Jefferson accurately pointed out, Meriwether Lewis, had his office in his bedroom, right here in this room. And it was here he embarked on his great expedition to the Pacific.

In this house, Jefferson famously wore his carpet slippers to receive the British King's Ambassador. In the Green Room, he delighted his guests with his insights into science and philosophy and law—any subject, except what Jefferson called the hated occupation of politics.

Jefferson holds the American imagination because he articulated the American creed. We declared our independence with his words that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with unalienable rights. Jefferson is the poet laureate of American freedom.

Our world echoes with Jefferson's ideals, even though Jefferson did not always act as if they were true. The same Thomas Jefferson who wrote the original ordinance banning slavery in the Northwest Territories lived on the labor of slaves. The same Jefferson who denied racial equality spoke ringing words of equal rights. He doubted the existence of the Christian God, but he trembled for his country when he remembered that the God he doubted was just.

No wonder America sees itself in Thomas Jefferson. He was what we are: marked with faults, inspired by strong ideals.

Thomas Jefferson still inspires us. He believed that education was the key to human potential. We must be committed to educating every single child in America. His Louisiana Purchase threw open the opportunities of this vast country, and we must dedicate ourselves to extending opportunity wider and wider. Above all, Jefferson believed in liberty, in the ability of citizens to govern their own country and govern their own lives. We must always affirm this democratic faith.

Like many great men, Thomas Jefferson leaves behind a complex legacy. Tomorrow would have been his 258th birthday. On his 358th birthday, Americans will still be debating his achievements and his faults, his words and his deeds.

Perhaps the best verdict came from one of Jefferson's keenest admirers and sharpest critics, the first Republican President, Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was invited in 1859 to come to Boston to speak at a Jef-

ferson birthday event in that city. He was unable to attend, and so he put his thoughts in a letter.

At that time, Jefferson was a contentious name in American politics. His memory had been hijacked by slaveholders who distorted many of his deeds and most of his words. But Lincoln saw further and deeper. When the view beyond the south window was swamp and the stump of the Washington Monument, when there were no cherry blossoms, no Jefferson Memorial, no Monticello on the nickel, and no Jefferson Building for the Library of Congress, Lincoln could still see the enduring meaning of Thomas Jefferson in American and world history. Here is what he wrote:

All honor to Jefferson, to the man who in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a merely revolutionary document an abstract truth, applicable to all men and at all times. And so, to embalm it there, that today and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to the very harbingers of a reappearing tyranny and oppression.

Happy birthday, Mr. Jefferson.

And now I am honored to sign a proclamation celebrating Thomas Jefferson's birth and his continuing influence on our great land.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Roxane Gilmore, wife of Gov. James S. Gilmore III of Virginia. The Thomas Jefferson Day proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.